

San Leon/Bacliff, Texas Project (2011-ongoing)

The Situation: San Leon/Bacliff is an isolated, unincorporated area on the southeast Texas coast. Out of the approximately 4,000 households, a significant number are younger, live below the poverty line, disabled and undereducated. This was a fishing/shrimping community that lost its base; now what little employment there is, is in basic services. There are pockets of middle class homes, but there are also equal, if not greater, areas of poverty and illegal drug-activity ravaged homes. Most houses in these latter areas are trailers, mobile homes, shacks or other dwellings that are not of hurricane strength (thanks to Hurricane Ike in 2008, many homes still lack parts of roofs, windows, etc...).

The Challenge: Sub-tropical, poverty- and disease- ridden area, widespread signs of pet overpopulation and human and animal suffering.

The Rescuers: Sarah (San Leon resident, specialty was cats but is quickly being dog expert as well), Tom (nearby resident, veteran dog rescuer), Matt (nearby resident, dog fosterer, volunteer sheriff deputy and animal cruelty investigator).

The Project: February 2011, Tom and Sarah created the video outlining the challenge and received from 31Paws a grant to pursue spay/neuter/wellness work in the San Leon/Bacliff communities. January 2012, Matt joined Tom and Sarah and received a 31Paws training grant to support his Galveston County Sheriff's Office Animal Cruelty Investigator volunteer position. Their work is ongoing.

The Conversations: In a set of Q&As, 31Paws asked Sarah, Tom, and Matt to talk about their proactive rural animal welfare work – the strategies, successes, and failures with the San Leon/Bacliff people and animals.



Sarah



Tom



Matt



Cat on San Leon house debris, 1 day after Hurricane Ike, September 2008

Sarah

31Paws: We learned of Sarah and San Leon through Tom, a veteran dog rescuer. Tom wrote: "My enlightenment over the conditions in San Leon has come from two primary sources. The first is from my friend and rescue colleague, Sarah Manns, who lives in San Leon. Sarah has been working for several years now to alleviate the suffering of animals in San Leon through her efforts to get people to spay and neuter, and to care for the animals there. Sarah has personally had hundreds of feral and semi-owned cats altered, as well as a smaller number of dogs. Initially Sarah called upon me on occasion to help with a dog rescue issue, and I got to know her well through these collaborations. Sarah is the photographer of many of the horrible conditions shown in the video, and was my "tour guide" for the San Leon Project Introduction Video.

The second eye-opener on San Leon came from serving on the BOD for BAPA, Bay Area Pet Adoptions, which is located in San Leon. I recall being amazed at the number of locals who regularly showed up to BAPA seeking handouts of food for their cats and dogs. More than once I heard people mention that their dog or cat just had another litter and they needed more food, or that their animal was pregnant again and they needed more food. BAPA recorded the people's information and turned it over to Sarah for her to see that each animal gets comprehensive care and gets altered.

Between the list and Sarah Mann's knowledge of the San Leon community, she and I have been out to vaccinate, worm, and provide heartworm tests and heartworm preventative to members of the community. What we see are a large number of intact dogs and cats perpetuating the suffering.



Litter after litter are born, and most often the litters are given away, unvaccinated and intact, to poor neighbors who want a puppy

or kitten as a new acquisition in their bleak lives. A year later the puppies or kittens that have not succumb to Parvo or the perils of the road, end up pregnant and the cycle continues with their own litter being placed in a box out by the street with a scrawled sign reading "free puppies" or "free kittens." Often the kittens are left to become feral, leading to large numbers of feral colonies that Sarah is continually working to assist.

Sarah, just yesterday, organized a free wellness clinic (in cooperation with AAGC) in San Leon to provide vaccines, heartworm tests and veterinary assessments. I am told a large number of people showed up, and about 70 (about half the crowd) was turned away for lack of time. It is my desire and commitment that Sarah and I can provide vaccines to these animals, and then get them in to a clinic to be seen by a vet, receive their rabies vaccine and spayed."

Feb. 2011. 31Paws Grant awarded to Tom English and Sarah Manns for San Leon Project Work.

31Paws: Sarah, it's wonderful to speak with you and to learn of your years of working with the San Leon/Bacliff people and animals. Let's get right to our Q&A:

1. National numbers can be awfully misleading for a local area. Sarah, could you please offer your best guess, based on your extensive on-site experience, as to the number of animals needing basic medical care and the number of animals not altered in San Leon/Bacliff areas?

Sarah: "I am terrible at guessing a number of animals. However going door to door and working local events, it seems 95% of the people residing in this area have at least 2 or more pets. Of that 95% I would guess 5% of that have approx. 4 animals. I can't even guess on the hoarder situations we find and eventually clean up. In all I would probably just take the population & x it by an average of 2.5 animals per home to average the 5% that don't have any. Feral cat numbers seems explosive here. Bacliff and the spillway of San Leon are so over run with feral cats. I'm blown away at the number of colonies. Just found a woman in Bacliff feeding over 27 feral cats; I have personally taken to be altered over 200 feral cats and I haven't made a dent. At the beginning of 2011, I would say 99% of the homes visited with dogs/cats were not altered, vaccinated or even have a current rabies. But it is changing and we are working to get a handle on the "owned" pets."



31Paws comments: Based on Sarah's experience we believe that the national averages of 39% of households owning 1.69 dogs (89% of whom are altered), 33% of households owning 2.2 cats (94% of whom are altered), and 0.5 feral cats per household are low for the San Leon area. Warm, humid conditions allow feral animals to live throughout the year (i.e. not freezing deaths) and reproduce with relative ease; add poverty to that and you get a significant companion animal over-population problem.

**2. What do you make sure is in your vehicle before starting out for the day?
What are the costs of these?**

Sarah: I drive a Toyota Rav4. My car at all times has dog & cat food/leashes, collars in the event I see a homeless animal which is often in the San Leon area. However if I am doing an outreach run, (about once a week) I load with additional food, flea meds, vaccines, hw prev. Then depending on the season, I am loaded with blankets & plastic dog houses or igloos for winter & kiddie pools for our hot weather. Many animals in this area live tied to a chain with little or no shelter from the elements or shade from the hot sun. The cost varies, sometimes I spend a good amount, sometimes I get things donated. I purchased 2 pallets of dog food from the Houston food bank for a small handling fee. I am not usually that lucky.

3. How do you approach people you don't know and tell them about what you are doing? What do you do with mentally unstable people (are there many)?

Sarah: When I see dogs chained or look like they need help, I just drive up and knock on the door & introduce myself. I usually first ask them how many animals they have & start assessing to see if they are on the prev, altered etc., then let them know I am here to help not judge, because many people are embarrassed about the condition the dog(s) or cats(s) are in. I explain we are part of an outreach program going door to door. I usually explain the process of what we do, to gain the trust. Tom usually allows me to do the first approach to assess, then I let him know how many vaccines to draw up etc. Tom usually takes over 95% of the medical because he is quick & efficient. While he does the medical, I am gathering all info on the owners & animals to get them scheduled at the clinic. Many people in this area are very unstable financially as well as mentally. We see a good amount of folks on disability and or substance abuse problems. Finding "normal" is not the norm in this area.



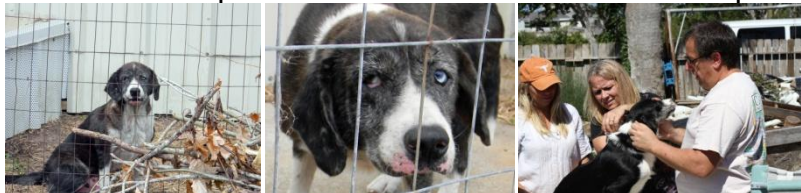
4. What has worked for you in convincing someone who says they don't want to alter their pet?

Sarah: I use several tactics to persuade people. I will tell them we will give them "free flea" medicine or a vaccine to help combat disease if they will allow me to alter their pet. I also tell them that animals are being euthanized at a high rate at the animal county services. 95% of these owners do not have transportation & attempt to use that as an excuse. I tell them it's their lucky day & I will transport to and from the clinic. I have them sign the consent form right then and there. I have offered free food to last a month to try to persuade the altering of the pet.

5. Do you see a need/use for community wellness clinics?

Sarah: Most definitely, yes! This allows us to meet and talk with many many people all at once...we put out different tables on basic health issues for companion animals, we get different groups in the community to come pitch in (one set of older gentlemen helped pay for (and install!) some outdoor dog trolleys to replace the chains so many dogs are on. The animal owners get to talk to each other, learn more about their neighbors, what is happening in animal welfare...it is a great community event that has loads of benefits for the animals and their owners. Check out our videos of the most recent one we held – hundreds of animals got vaccinated, looked at, and 200 signed up for spay and neuter!

Oh, and as one specific example, do you remember the poor dog named "Spirit" that I had to put food over the fence and sneak comfortis in her food? The owners would not let me help her. They showed up to the community event and I saw them in line with different dog. I spoke with them and told them they needed to go get Spirit to be treated or they would need to leave. They argued stating she "smelled bad" and they were too embarrassed to bring her. I didn't back down, as they came up with yet another excuse she had no collar or leash to bring her. That's when your awesome donation of the leashes and collars came in. I handed one of each over to them and they relented! They went and brought her back to be treated. She was vaccinated, wormed given flea control and hw prev. She will be at the clinic in the upcoming weeks.



6. How much are spays and neuters in your program? How much do people pay? Any tips on getting them to contribute?

Sarah: We use a low cost or non-profit clinic and a local private vet practice that has offered to match the clinic's fees. The fees range from \$30.00 and up to \$80.00 per animal depending on weight & sex of the animal. I try to collect at least a \$10.00 fee for the rabies vaccine. If they have a job I ask for a \$20.00 co-pay. Some people I do not collect any money. Several people here live in campers or rent RV's by the week and move from place to place and some are not able to feed themselves. So we will offer free dog/cat food, flea meds, hw prev. for a few months to help them get back on track. I had found an elderly woman in San Leon named "Dottie." After scheduling her dog for surgery I learned she had just recently lost her husband and two adult sons to cancer and one to suicide within about 6 month period. She had sold the furniture in her home to pay for the last funeral. She had several health issues herself, I told her I was going to waive any fees to help her dog. She explained she was caring the dog that had belonged to her son that had recently passed and it was all she had left from him. It really humbled me when I dropped the dog back off after surgery and she was so grateful she cried. She had a plastic flower and \$4.00 cash she insisted I take for her gratitude. I took the \$4.00 and the plastic flower and thanked her. I drove back over and gave her a free leash, collar and some food for the dog. It is people like this that make the long hours of trying to make change for animals so worth it.

7. Do you do anything format to obtain/document consent?

Sarah: Yes, I carry around in my car a consent form that I have the people sign.

8. How do animals get to the s/n clinic? How many of them do you keep with you and for how long before returning to their home? Do you do anything for the animals prior to taking them to the clinic (so that they won't be refused?)

Sarah: 95% of the animals going to the s/n clinic are transported by myself or Tom. Many owners in this area do not have transportation or a valid drivers license. If we find a home with 20+ animals I call Tom and he helps transport, which is a huge help! If we have extreme heat or cold, we will do post surgery care for a few days before being released back to the owner. Many owners that have a dog, cat or multiple animals have them living on chains outdoors etc. Feral cats- I keep males 24 hours, females 72 hours before releasing. Here is a photo of feral cats awaiting surgery in my cat rehab house:



9. You are a “cat specialist” – what exactly does that mean?

Sarah: My husband is a master carpenter and, bless his soul, he built a special rescue/rehab cabin on our property for my work with cats. It is here that I bring sick cats, administer to them, and keep them after surgery for recovery. Here are a few found cats:

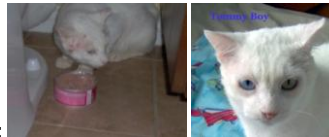


Here are a few before and after shots:



Found kittens -- Dehydrated, ear-mites, eye infection & anemic from fleas.

An old feral cat we named Tommy:



10. Are there any dangerous areas you go to? How do you approach them?

Sarah: Unfortunately yes, there are many dangerous areas in this area. It's unincorporated with no law enforcement stationed here so there are lots of drugs & some gang activity in Bacliff. I used to frequent these places as I gained trust of many drug dealers etc., they were finally convinced I didn't care what they did, just wanted to help the animal. I no longer go alone not for over a year now. I always call Tom English if I know it's a "bad place." Tom has never refused to come help an animal in need no matter how bad the area. I usually give him heads up with the situation and he often will load a couple of his rottweilers to join us, they seem to get people's attention quickly. There was a location Tom & I brought Randy to in Bacliff last spring (Tom pulled a puppy and named him Randy) Tom and I had worked it a few times vaccinating & collecting animals for surgery. I told Tom several times I had a bad feeling there, but it was filled with dogs, cats, puppies etc. that needed our help. It was a really bad trailer park with people dealing drugs as Tom stood in the parking vaccinating dog after dog. About 2 months later there was a shoot out in the very parking lot and a man was shot to death.

11. What do you do if you come upon what you believe to be a cruelty situation?

Sarah: Call animal control, however it seems nothing seems to come of it. Usually we take photos, get owner's info however the laws don't seem to be enforced and it's extremely frustrating. We have also "pulled" animals with owner consent when we have the opportunity to do so. We have found terrible situations like "Babe", dog run over and the owner does nothing but let the animal linger for days before passing. Dogs chained up dying from distemper, etc. We need a cruelty investigator.

12. When you trap feral cats, what problems have you encountered either with the cats, the people in the neighborhood, the clinics? Have you ever been bitten?

Sarah: Most people are grateful for me trapping in the neighborhoods. Although I sometimes come across people who get angry that I have to release them back where I trapped them...they want them gone. I often explain that at least now they can live their life out without bringing more kittens. All clinics will not accept feral cats. Many don't want to deal with or do not know how to deal with a feral. It's not a difficult process and I have even forwarded youtube videos from Alley cat allies that shows what an easy process it is. I have been scratched and bitten. I have had my butt kicked many times by feral cats/kittens, oddly I don't fear them so much, I just try to respect them when I trap and transport. I was bitten once, opening a trap to do release because I did not pay attention.



13. Please relate one success story.

Sarah: Since meeting and working with Tom, he has mentored me through many successful rescues, really more than I can count. My first "dog rescue" I had no clue how to help a dog that was in a dire situation living on a dangerous high traffic curve in San Leon. The dog was emaciated, fearful and running the streets for apparently a long time. I barely knew Tom back then, but called him for his advice. I explained the dog looked near death but I didn't know how to catch him to help him. I had tried feeding him food, pouring it on the street, but when I tried to approach he ran away. Tom dropped what he was doing and drove me around for an hour trying to help me find & help this dog. He gave me tips and showed me how to get the lead around the dog's neck etc. I have watched Tom do this many times since; he makes it look so easy. Well I failed

over and over again. Finally after about a week I opted to get a dog trap, fill it with cheeseburgers and trap the dog. Although excited, I feared he was so sick and so far gone. I loaded him in my van, brought him to the clinic and the vet met me in the parking lot. He was sedated to be assessed, hw tested, etc. It was decided that he would be neutered, microchipped etc. right then so not to further traumatize him. The staff was amazed that his hw test was neg. I was so elated I forgot to call Tom to tell him the dog was rescued. However that afternoon, I received a call from him & he stated he paid the dog a visit in recovery and thought he was a handsome boy. He was named "Reagan" and was adopted by a neighbor. He is currently spoiled rotten. :) (See photo of Reagan attached) Someone stated that people called Reagan "Ghost" when he lived on the streets, thinking he would not last much longer, although they did



nothing to help him.

14. Please relate one story whose outcomes you deem unsuccessful.

Sarah: Tom and I were going door to door doing outreach in San Leon. We had come across a home with a 5 month old female pit mix named "Shay." (very friendly) Tom vaccinated her and we scheduled her for surgery the following week. I went to pick the dog up to transport her to the clinic. Shay began to vomit again and again in my car. I got her to the clinic, asked the staff to come out to my car to do a parvo test, The parvo test was positive. I called Tom very upset, he said to drive the dog to another clinic and he would meet me in the parking lot. The dog was going downhill by the minute vomiting uncontrollable and now had diarrhea. Tom came to my car and carried the dog into the vet hospital to get her help. Tom was already helping 3 other small puppies with parvo from San Leon at the same clinic. Shay was in the hospital for over a week and she survived the parvo. I had no room to bring Shay to my home, so had to return the dog to the owner who of course had no money. We waited a month before re-scheduling Shay for her spay so she could be 100% healthy. The owner informed Tom and I she had decided to "Breed" Shay & admitted she had lost another puppy to parvo a few years back. That was failure for me. Not only because we paid nearly \$2000.00 to save the dog, (not to mention the other 3 puppies Tom had fought to save from San Leon, two passed away.) but because clearly the owner had not learned the importance of spay/neuter or vaccines. We can drive around vaccinating, educating until the cows come home to try to prevent disease. However it is an epic failure when the owner has learned nothing & continues the cycle of destruction of breeding and not vaccinating.



Rocky, his owner, and Tom's hand in syringe box

Tom

31Paws: As we said, Tom is a veteran dog rescuer who systematically organizes his work in order to accomplish the most for dogs. With over a 1,000 adoptions, mostly long distance, Tom is impressive in both efficiency and productivity. Being rescue “neighbors”, Tom and Sarah came to know one another and Tom started traveling to San Leon to help Sarah. We asked Tom about some aspects of his San Leon work.

1. Hi Tom, we think what you do is great. We'd like to create and make public a website that shows what you and Sarah do. Do you think this would be a help? Do you have any reservations about doing so?

Tom: I really like the idea of discussing the actions of an embedded rescuer. Sarah embodies this so well. She does all the talking with people and I just act as the support tech - I love this role and feel Sarah has opened a world to me where I can do some good with my specific and limited skills. I understand what you mean about training others to do this, but I am a bit at a loss as to how to train someone. The reality of it is, a large amount of experience backs up the actions we take. I have handled a thousand dogs in almost every condition and environment, from extremely scared dogs to rather aggressive dogs. It is difficult for me to think of encouraging someone else to do these things unless they have a very broad background in rescue and handling dogs. As well, I worry about Sarah going it alone to these places - I believe she should always be accompanied by a male, and when I know we are going to one of the more unstable spots (suspected fighting pitties, for example) I am sure to have two of my largest and toughest rotties in the van with us. You did not get a chance to meet Aldo and Bella - Aldo is a very big male, and Bella is big and VERY devoted female with absolute fearlessness when it comes to protecting those she loves. A large number of the people we encounter are at odds with the law, somewhat desperate, and under the influence. I have not met one yet that I thought would not recognize the need to respect Aldo and Bella. If someone was already doing what we do, we could help them to do it better. And we could support others to do what we do in safer communities.



Aldo and Bella

2. Ok, let's get to the basics -- What do you put in your van before setting out? Why use a van?

Tom: The usual assortment of medications and equipment is as follows: Crates, leashes, a few collars, a large number of syringes, blood collection tubes, tourniquet, flea and tick preventative, wormers (both Strongid and a wormer containing tapeworm meds), ivermectin, cephalixin, ketoconazole, ear cleaning solution, cotton swabs, an assortment of vaccines (DHPP, Bordetella, and Feline RCP), camera, camcorder, tripod, moist dog food, and most often, two rottweilers.

3. What diseases do you most encounter? Which of these can you treat and which do you refer to a vet? And if you refer to a vet, do the people take them?

Tom: Most common diseases are skin infections caused by fleas. This we can usually treat on the spot with Frontline and sometimes we need Cephalixin. Sometimes we see opportunistic fungal infections and start on Ketoconazole. Most adult dogs are asymptomatic with heartworm infection. For all dogs we initiate heartworm prevention. We also worm every animal, assuming most have intestinal parasites. For those animals requiring veterinary care, we will usually bring the animal to the vet ourselves. The citizens often do not have transportation and certainly do not have the money nor the inclination to visit a vet. We will bring an animal to a vet only for severe cases. We prefer (as do the vets) that we give time for the Frontline, wormer, and vaccines to take effect before bringing the animals into a clinic, and then make wellness a part of the neuter process.

4. How do you determine which animals you will take to your home, and why do you take them there -- for treatment, for rehoming? Do you have a special place to take them and if so, how is it constructed?

Tom: Of primary importance is the desire of the owner of the animal. If they want to relinquish the animal for rehoming, or if they want to keep the animal, we must honor their wishes. I take home animals based on several criteria, the first is whether I can do well by the animal or not. I must have sufficient time, room, resources, and skill to help the animal achieve an adoptable condition. If the dog is sufficiently stable and healthy, I may send it to one of my foster homes. Otherwise it comes home with me. I have on several occasions taken in dogs simply for treatment, with the intention of them

returning to their homes. However, people often want the dog to stay with me once I get it, and therefore I end up being the foster home for the dog as I help it to become adoptable.

At my house I have a climate controlled garage where a number of dogs can be fostered and crate trained. Well-socialized dogs go here, and get to experience life with a large, stable pack of dogs. I also have a two-room climate controlled bungalow, with one room as an isolation chamber (has its own air system separate from the main room) for sick dogs and the other as a play room/living quarters.

5. When you bring new animals home, how do you manage integrating them with existing animals?

Tom: I integrate after the dog has become comfortable with me, knows to listen to me for guidance, and is non-contagious. I start with my two stablest dogs - a male and a female rottweiler. They are stable and strong, so new dogs tend to look to them for guidance. From there, I work introducing a pack member at a time until their social pack is established and the hierarchy is resolved.

6. Have you ever been bitten?

Tom: Yes, several times. Each time has been the result of getting between dogs that are fighting. Even the toughest of fights end once they realize they have bitten me - it is so contrary to a dog's nature to bite someone who they see as a leader. They get so confused when they realize what happened. I have not yet been bitten by a dog in the outreach work - it certainly could happen, though. The best defense against this is to know how to read a dog and know how to behave in a confident, yet non-threatening way around dogs.

7. What kind of education do you give to animal owners, what medications do you offer? And do you have any feedback on whether people are using what you gave them?

Tom: We provide education about flea and tick prevention such as what to use and where to buy it. We also provide ivermectin and dosing guidelines for the people to follow. Dispensing antibiotics is very hit-or-miss in the field. Many people are not mentally competent to administer these medications. For lack of better knowledge, I assume a 50% chance that anyone uses the medications we leave.



We brought Little Coco a sweater last week, since she lost most of her fur. It is starting to grow back and she is feeling much better!



"Rocky" is also doing much better. He was neutered last week, given some antibiotics & good quality food for his skin & coat. His owner called me to say that Tom must have given Rocky a happy shot. I explained to him it was not the shot he received, rather the flea prev. that has him feeling so good & happy.

8. What do you think are minimally acceptable conditions in San Leon to have a dog? Has your opinion of "minimally acceptable" changed over time?

Tom: Minimally acceptable in San Leon is vaccines, neuter, heartworm prevention, food, shelter, and a little companionship. My expectation of minimally acceptable has degraded over time.



Metal Shack in San Leon, no windows, no power, no running water; 6 dogs living with man inside (all vaccinated, altered at clinic and still living with man)

9. How many dogs have you rescued and rehomed from the San Leon area? Where do you do so, what do you say about the dog's background, and what do potential adopters say when you tell them?

Tom: I estimate we have rescued and rehomed about 100 dogs from San Leon. Often I will show potential adopters a video of San Leon so that they can get a better feel for the hardship the dog has endured.

(Sarah interjects: "One of my favorite rescues on fm 517 with Tom is the set of photos below. This dog had a litter of starving puppies and she was emaciated living on the streets. We didn't find the puppies until the next day. Look at them now!")



10. What is the typical cost to you to rescue and rehome a dog?

Tom: The basic veterinary costs to rescue and rehome a dog will vary wildly. It can be anywhere from about \$100 for a healthy puppy to a thousand for a parvo puppy, or a dog with a broken leg. Heartworm treatment can be costly for large dogs simply due to the amount of immiticide they require.

11. How did the last community wellness clinic go, in your opinion?

Tom: Let me quote from an email I sent to you the day after the event:

“Here are some photos of our outreach clinic today in San Leon. Sarah did an amazing job of organizing and running this event. With the vaccine program and a new account with Merial (50% off wholesale on Frontline Plus for the first order) we were able to provide for everyone. Nearly 200 animals signed up for spay and neuter!



I am glad we can share a bit of footage with you to see what it was like. I was shocked this morning when I arrived 40 minutes early and found more than a hundred people and hundreds of animals waiting. It was amazing and great and very fulfilling. Thanks so much for your support, encouragement, and assistance.”

....How did the wellness clinic go, you ask? It was a wonderful day.

12. What is one of your success stories?

Tom: There have been many that touch me deeply. This is a bit like asking a mother to tell you about only one of her children and not the others. One that comes to mind quickly is Avalon. Avalon came to me as a 5 week old puppy from a very bad home in San Leon. She did not get the food or water she needed and was very weak. Soon after arriving to us, Avalon broke with parvo. We rushed her to our animal hospital and they got her right in to treatment. We have a good working relationship with our hospital, so if I say the dog is positive for a parvo test (I run at home), they immediately start treatment without the need to confirm the test on their own. Avalon became very

ill, but fought through and survived. Avalon went on to be adopted by a distinguished professor of law at Yale university, and now wants for nothing.



13. What is a failure story?

Tom: Failures occur often - two failures that come to mind quickly are Avalon's brother and sister, who did not survive parvo, even with treatment. The pain, suffering, and loss of resources on treating and losing parvo puppies is what makes me so passionate about our vaccine outreach programs.

14. Thank you, Tom, for talking. If people ask us to ask you questions, will you be willing to answer?

Tom: Given my time constraints, and the appropriateness of the question, certainly.



One of Matt's many rescue pups!

Matt

31Paws: Matt is the newest member of the team, but comes with the dual credentials of being an active rescue foster home and having a considerable amount of law enforcement experience in Galveston County, county home of San Leon and Bacliff

areas. He has volunteered to assume the duties of Animal Cruelty Investigator for the Galveston County Sheriff's department. Let's get right to the questions:

1. Hi Matt, what do you put in your animal cruelty investigator's vehicle before setting out?

Matt: I have the following: Collapsible cage, Catch pole, Evidence collection – Camera, paper bags, envelopes, etc., Normal items such as pens, notepads, clipboards, ticket book, forms. I also have jug of water, towels, isolation gowns, rubber gloves, leather gloves, slip on shoe covers, rubber boots, liquid soap, alcohol gel, Laptop and portable (battery powered) printer, Respirator – ammonia, Cat and/or dog wet food.

I don't have but need: Camcorder, Tranquilizer gun – Will be ordering once I have gone through the course, Heavy leather bit gloves, Bolt cutters – Big and little set, for locks to cattle and cutting wire fencing. There is probably more, but I will have to think some more about it.

2. What is the major cause of "cruelty" situations?

Matt: Ignorance seems to be the leading factor so far. Lack of money to properly care for the animals is another.

3. Who are the major reporters of cruelty -- neighbors? police? rescuers?

Matt: Animal control and concerned citizens. There are a lot of calls made by passer-bys that see animals in distress and make a call.

4. Where are the animals placed when confiscated?

Matt: Dogs and Cats go to County Animal control or if the individual city has an AC then they go to them. If it is livestock, we have a county park where the sheriff has stables for holding (I tend to look for other places to keep the animals). Horses go to Habitat for horses and cattle will probably go to HSPCA.

5. What is the legal definition of cruelty in your county?

Matt: It is a state definition:

§ 42.09. CRUELTY TO ANIMALS. (a) A person commits an offense if the person intentionally or knowingly:

- (1) tortures an animal;

(2) fails unreasonably to provide necessary food, care, or shelter for an animal in the person's custody;

(3) abandons unreasonably an animal in the person's custody;

(4) transports or confines an animal in a cruel manner;

(5) kills, seriously injures, or administers poison to an animal, other than cattle, horses, sheep, swine, or goats, belonging to another without legal authority or the owner's effective consent;

(6) causes one animal to fight with another;

(7) uses a live animal as a lure in dog race training or in dog coursing on a racetrack;

(8) trips a horse;

(9) injures an animal, other than cattle, horses, sheep, swine, or goats, belonging to another without legal authority or the owner's effective consent; or

(10) seriously overworks an animal.

(b) It is a defense to prosecution under this section that the actor was engaged in bona fide experimentation for scientific research.

6. Is animal cruelty investigation significantly different than "normal" policing? If so, why? If not, why?

Matt: No not really, just different laws that most law enforcement are not familiar with. Generally, LE does investigations in a bubble with other LE. In ACI investigations, you have to work with animal control and other organizations such as Habitat for Horses. I rely on others to help with the animals care during the holding period, then help with placement or disposal. Habitat also does a great job of documenting the condition of the horses and providing vet care.

7. What is the best thing about doing this job? the worst thing?

Matt: The best thing is getting the animal out of the deplorable conditions and showing them that someone cares about them. The worst thing is having to see the poor conditions that the animals live in and dealing with people who see nothing wrong with what they do.

8. In addition to your law enforcement work, you are a foster home for rescue pups. We hope you don't mind if we quote a description you wrote and sent us of a couple foster pups in your care:

“This puppy along with 4 others was captured by Texas City Animal Control. The puppies were at the shelter for about two weeks during which time they go no attention and were held in a holding area because of the lack of adoption floor space. I was asked by an ACO to foster two of the puppies. Both became ill once home. They were tested for parvo and were positive. Since I work with Tom, he made arrangements for the puppies to be treated at his vet under his account. ACO just called me and they are putting down the siblings if I do not rescue,going later today to pick them up.

No puppy should have to live their first few days under a house and then in a shelter. Me and my wife are trying to give them a better start and save them from certain death.”

Matt: Kinda hard to refuse – here's a picture of a couple of these pups.

